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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: MIDEAST, GITMO, BALKANS, SRI LANKA, BURMA,
DISARMAMENT

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- [1](#)1. Lead Stories Summary

ZDF-TV's early evening newscast Heute opened with a story on the strikes in kindergartens, and ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau opened with a story on the 2007 German Poverty Report. Newspapers led with stories on carmaker Porsche, the poverty report, and the resignation of the head of the West LB state bank. Die Welt focused on the German health care system. Editorials focused on the poverty report and the dispute between carmakers Porsche and VW.

- [1](#)2. Israeli PM Netanyahu in Washington

Under the headline "Netanyahu withstands Obama - for the time being," Berliner Zeitung editorialized: "Israeli and Palestinian peace activists would be desperate if they did not have a last hope: Barack Obama, who will tell the conflicting parties how to reach a two-state solution. This was Obama's intention when he met with Netanyahu yesterday. Not just during their tte-`-tte but also in front of cameras, Obama clearly said what is necessary to achieve a peaceful co-existence of Israelis and Palestinians, namely a stop of the settlement building in the West Bank and opportunities for the people in the Gaza Strip. Netanyahu does not share any of these thoughts. However, he tried to conceal that as best as possible during his visit to the White House. Netanyahu avoided opposing the man who can. Both of them know that they will have to work together a great deal in the future, for instance on Iran. Netanyahu sees Tehran as a threat, while Obama believes a dialogue with the mullahs could be a means to resolve the conflict. Despite all the differences, Obama and Netanyahu avoided an open clash. Their meeting did not exactly look like the beginning of a great friendship. However, mutual trust is timidly growing, which is important if we want to get the Mideast peace process moving again."

13. Guantanamo Prisoners

Under the headline "George W. Obama," FT Deutschland editorialized that, "from a tactical point of view, the decision to continue the military tribunals for detainees in Guantanamo might be right. However, it is a moral and legal disaster." The paper added: "There are hundreds of reasons why Americans and the rest of the world found Barack Obama so fantastic. He is rhetorically brilliant and looks impressive. Above all, he promised one thing: change.... Obama has now seriously damaged his reputation. He does not want to prosecute CIA officials who have tortured in the name of Bush government. Contrary to a court decision, he does not want to publish photos that show the mistreatment by U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. And now, Obama wants to resurrect military tribunals by which the Bush government wanted to try terror suspects irrespective of western legal principles. The decision is not a belated realization but a regrettable wavering of a man who faces a catastrophic heritage.... These detainees must be brought before an orderly court - with all the rights an accused person has. This is complicated and takes time.... However, these are the rules and they are the best the U.S. and other democracies have. This is what differentiates democracies from dictatorships, authoritarian and religious regimes. The rule of law is our greatest achievement and we must not ignore it simply because it is inconvenient. It is even worse that Obama's caving in is welcomed on our side of the Atlantic. Unlike supporters of military tribunals claim, there is an alternative to them."

14. VP Biden in Bosnia

Frankfurter Allgemeine stated in a lengthy report on "U.S. Vice President Biden's voyage through southeastern Europe" that "his itinerary alone is a political issue. The fact that he begins his talks in the Bosnia-Herzegovina capital is seen as contempt of the Serbian claim to be the key country in the region. The fact that the guest from the West is also travelling to Kosovo, which Serbia views as a non-state and a renegade Serbian province, will not make Biden's talks easier. However, it is right to focus more on Bosnia since Kosovo's declaration of independence last year got off so lightly. American and European diplomacy has seriously neglected the three-nation state in recent years."

15. End of Sri Lankan Civil War

Frankfurter Rundschau argued: "Now the Tamils can not only bury their dream of their own state, but they are even more defenseless in their home than before the war. Their fate is now in the hands of the Sinhalese government, which can be described with all kinds of adjectives, but not with the term trustworthy. But Premier Mahinda Rajapakse could easily demonstrate greatness in the moment of triumph and extend his hand to the Tamils. He has the chance to do so this Tuesday when he will deliver his victory address.... The most important means of pressure the world now has to help the Tamils is money. For the time being, the U.S. has blocked a loan with the IMF. This was good. It must link its 'yes' to forcing the Sri Lankan government to allow the Tamils a life in dignity. But this view can succeed only if Japan and China, the two biggest donors for Sri Lanka, back this policy. Thus far, they do not seem to care about the fate of the Tamils."

In an editorial Financial Times Deutschland judged: "President Rajapakse waged this war with partly inhumane cynicism. For this victory, he sacrificed not only the lives of thousands of Tamil civilians but partly also the freedom of the entire population. In Sri Lanka, the freedom of the press and other democratic rights were ignored. Even in the moment of triumph, the West must name such human rights violations and strongly condemn them. If the West wants to be taken seriously in Colombo, this criticism should not only be noble and naive. Especially a country such as Sri Lanka, which has a strong democratic tradition, cannot afford a relapse into barbarism. This war also focuses on values. The problem is that the island has suffered for a long time from the barbaric terror of the Tamil rebels, and it now has a partner in China that is not interested in human rights."

Regional daily Stuttgarter Zeitung opined: "There are almost no indications for the hope that the state will now integrate the Tamils. The treatment of the Tamils beyond the former LTTE areas,

especially in the refugee camps...was and continues to be inhumane. The prime minister, who has always ridden on the ticket of nationalists, will hardly change his understanding of the state. The insight from many parts of the world ranging from Northern Ireland, the Basque Provinces, Kosovo to Aceh and East Timor that minorities deserve rights instead of bullets in the 21st century will have wait for quite some time to be realized in Sri Lanka. The military struggle has now been decided, but the Tamil conflict has by no means been resolved."

According to die tageszeitung, "the death of rebel leader Prabhakaran should increase the chances to make peace. But in view of the inhumane way with which this victory was achieved on the back of hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians, that does not allow us to expect the end of the violence. The leadership of the war and its political, propagandistic accompaniment again demonstrated that the Tamils have every reason to revolt against the dominant Sinhalese policy. Thus far the government has not sent any signals of placing ethnic relations on a new basis. But this would be necessary to open the Tamils a promising way to achieve autonomy and equal rights."

16. Burmese Trial against Aung San Suu Kyi

"Burma's Icon, Unbroken," is the headline in Frankfurter Rundschau which reports: "Despite her 13 years under house arrest, Burma's Peace Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is unbroken. According to opposition sources, the 63-year old woman did not show any trace of tiredness, weakness or despair at the beginning of her trial on Monday. Right from the start she put the military regime on the defensive."

Die Welt carried a report under the headline: "Burma's National Hero Demonstrates Combative Behavior before Court," and writes: "The internationally criticized trial against opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been postponed right after its beginning. At the beginning of the trial, the 63-year-old woman demonstrated a combative behavior and she refused to enter the court room because the prosecutors did not call her by her full name. Foreign Minister Steinmeier called for an end to the trial and the immediate release of the Burmese politician. He said: 'The renewed arrest and the trial against Aung San Suu Kyi is evidence of the continued disrespect of the most elementary human rights in Myanmar.'"

Frankfurter Rundschau noted: "The wrong play has now begun and the regime in Burma seems to be determined to play it until the bitter end. The accusations are as ridiculous as the attempts of the military to give the macabre trial the disguise of the rule of law. Maybe the generals like to show to the world how powerless they really are. Neighboring India, the biggest democracy in the world, did not express any criticism...and the United States has not come up with anything else but new sanctions. This looks as helpless as the attempt by European diplomats to observe the trial in the Insein prison to 'make a stand.' They were refused entry without turning a hair."

Die Welt observed: "What the outside world thinks [about Aung San Suu Kyi's trial] does not matter. A fragile 63-year-old woman is fighting the power apparatus with no other weapon than her moral authority, the dignity of suffering and the quiet understanding of the majority of the oppressed. On the one hand, the powers-that-be feel safe, because China is supporting them thanks to Burma's oil and strategic resources. On the other hand, they have transferred their capital far into the North as if they were fleeing. Give or take the Nobel Peace prize, these are nothing but insignificant concerns of the West."

17. U.S.-Russian Disarmament Talks

Frankfurter Allgemeine carried a report headlined: "A New Start Attempt in Russian-U.S. Relations," and reported: "A success of the disarmament talks could be considered a confirmation for the success of a new beginning in U.S.-Russian relations which considerably cooled down over the past few years. At the moment, both sides at least seem to agree that a new disarmament treaty must focus to the same extent on warheads and on carrier systems. Russian statements before the talks also show that the problems that led to the failure of previous attempts for a new disarmament agreement are still

virulent. In view of the problems, there is skepticism in Moscow that the negotiations will succeed."

Handelsblatt argued that "from a formal point of view, the issue is to save the START Treaty. But when the U.S. and Russian envoys meet in Moscow this week, then more will be on the table: the treatment of Iran, the missile defense shield, non-proliferation and far away on the horizon, a world without nuclear weapons. Six weeks before the meeting between Barack Obama and Dmitrij Medvedev, at least the American wants to remove as many obstacles as possible. And this fits the policy that Vice President Biden announced after the change of power: a new beginning in relations with Russia. However, the new Russian security doctrine is heading in a different direction. It is true that it avoids the doctrine of the Cold War, but the Russian authors continue to focus on the fact that Moscow is not negotiating at eye level with Washington. The doctrine gives plenty of room to the restoration of this former state. Even 20 years after the fall of the Wall, the Russian cosmos in security policy is still focusing on the bipolar world between Moscow and Washington. But the path to cooperation has fewer stumbling blocks than just a few weeks ago. Basically the chances are good that the disarmament talks will not exhaust themselves in counting warheads but will really focus on a new start of U.S.-Russian relations. Making this happen will depend primarily on one person: Dmitrij Medvedev."

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